Gilgit to Karimabad

Gilgit–Karimabad	112 km	70 miles	3 hours
Karimabad-Nagar	8 km	5 miles	1 hour

Altitude : 2560 meters 8400 ft.

Population : 29,000

Jeeps may be hired from PTDC Motel 'Chinar Inn' at Gilgit at the following rates :

(i) Rs. 6/- per mile
(ii) Rs. 50/- per day
(iii) Rs. 50/- per night haltage

Public jeep transportation also available.
Accommodation: Hunza Hote, Rest House.

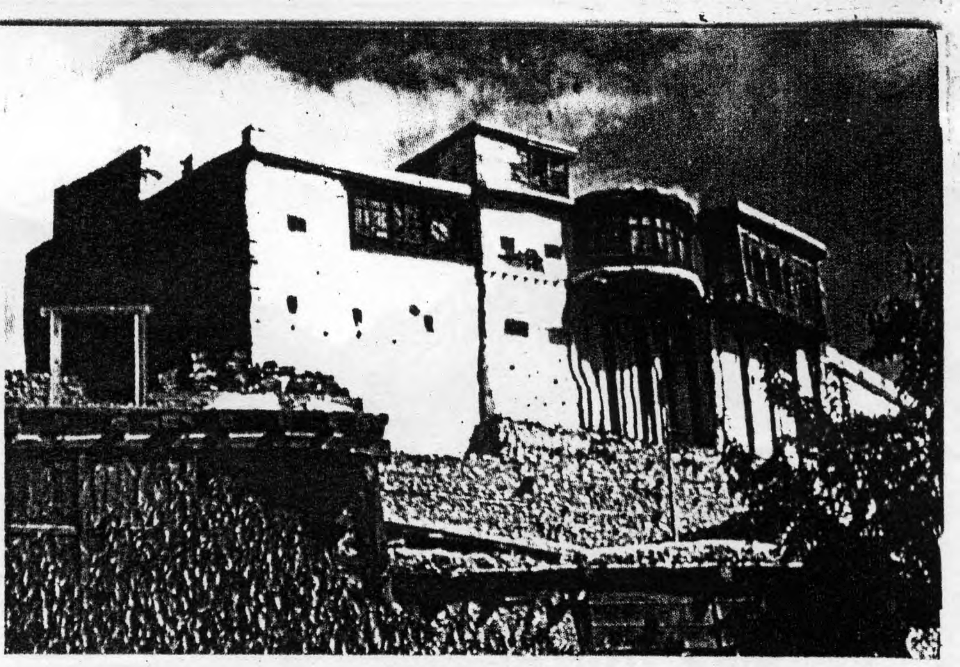
HUNZA

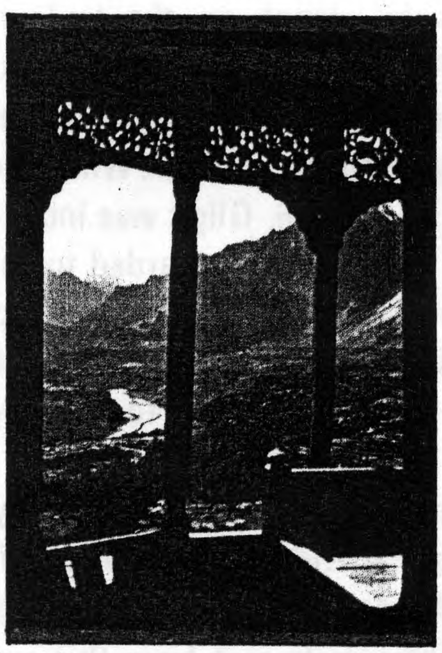
The KKH runs north from Gilgit along the Hunza River which joins the Gilgit River a mile below the town. The new bridge spans the Gilgit River at Daiynor, 8 km; 5 mi. below Gilgit. After passing the Chinese cemetery where those who gave their lives for the KKH lie, and through a precipitous barren gorge, a series of small hamlets nestled within terraced fields and fruit orchards appear opposite one another, on either side of the river. Formerly, each held a fort defending this access to Central Asia.

Hunza resented Kashmir's attempts to gain control and its rulers periodically expelled Kashmir garrisons, threatened Gilgit, and politicked with the rulers of Kashgar to the north, where the Russians were gaining influence.

Fearing Russian infiltration into their northern frontiers, the British took over direct political control at Gilgit in 1889. Incessant fratricidal intrigues in Hunza and Nagar made the area doubly insecure. This, coupled with the Mir of Hunza's consistent intransigence induced the British to march on Hunza in December 1891, where they fought a decisive battle at Nilit, 60 km; 38 mi. beyond Daiynor Bridge. After this the British garrisoned Aliabad until 1897 when Hunza became a princely state protected by the Government of British India.

The resplendent Hunza Valley sites among the highest mountains in the Karakoram Range, surrounded by tens of peaks 23–25 thousand feet (7000-7620 m.) high. Among the many fruits, 22 varieties of apricots reign supreme. The Mir's castle at Baltit above Karimabad is open to visitors. A rocky outcrop near the meeting of the Hunza and Nagar rivers is so profusely covered with petroglyphs that it has been named the Sacred Rock of Hunza.

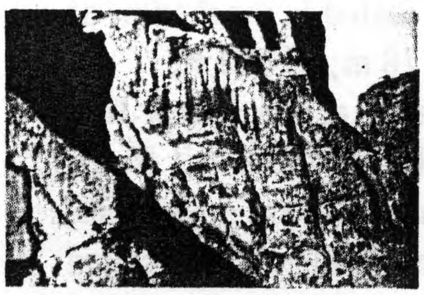




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1. *Baltit Castle*
2. *The valley from the balcony of Baltit Castle*
3. *Sacred Rock of Hunza, details*
4. *In Memory*

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HUNZA TO KHUNJERAB

	Kilometers	Miles	Time
From Gilgit to Khunjerab Pass & return	642	400	12 hours
Karimabad-Khunjerab Pass	209	130	3 hours
Karimabad-Hallegush	21	12	30 minutes
Hallegush—Passu	35	21	45 minutes
Passu-Khunjerab Pass round-about	121	75	3 hours.

Foreigners are not allowed yet to travel beyond Karimabad on Karakoram Highway.

To embark on a journey up the silk road is an adventure. While the time given from Hasan Abdal to Thakot which runs 163 k.m. through an old settled area of Hazara Division, is five hours to which one can add the time spent on a picnic, lunch or tea on the way, these estimates apply only if there is no landslide obstructing the passage of the road.

The probability is much more likely after Thakot from where the new construction of the Karakoram Highway had taken place. Due to the geological formations in an earthquake prone area and the continuous blasting of the rocks which went on for 15 years to make the road, the hillsides have not yet stabilised enough to withstand heavy rains. So it happens that without any advance notice, even long after rainfall, slides occur and hold up the traffic. You may be caught in one or more than one of these and that may cause delays. Be prepared for it. Have water and anything else you fancy with you, especially when you are accompanied by children. Clearing of the road is done as quickly as possible. So don't forget – while, you may now travel in a car or coach instead of on a yak or a horse, the journey into the most rugged mountains in the world is still an adventure which makes demands on your sense of humour and endurance and requires your whole-hearted cooperation and love for the unusual.



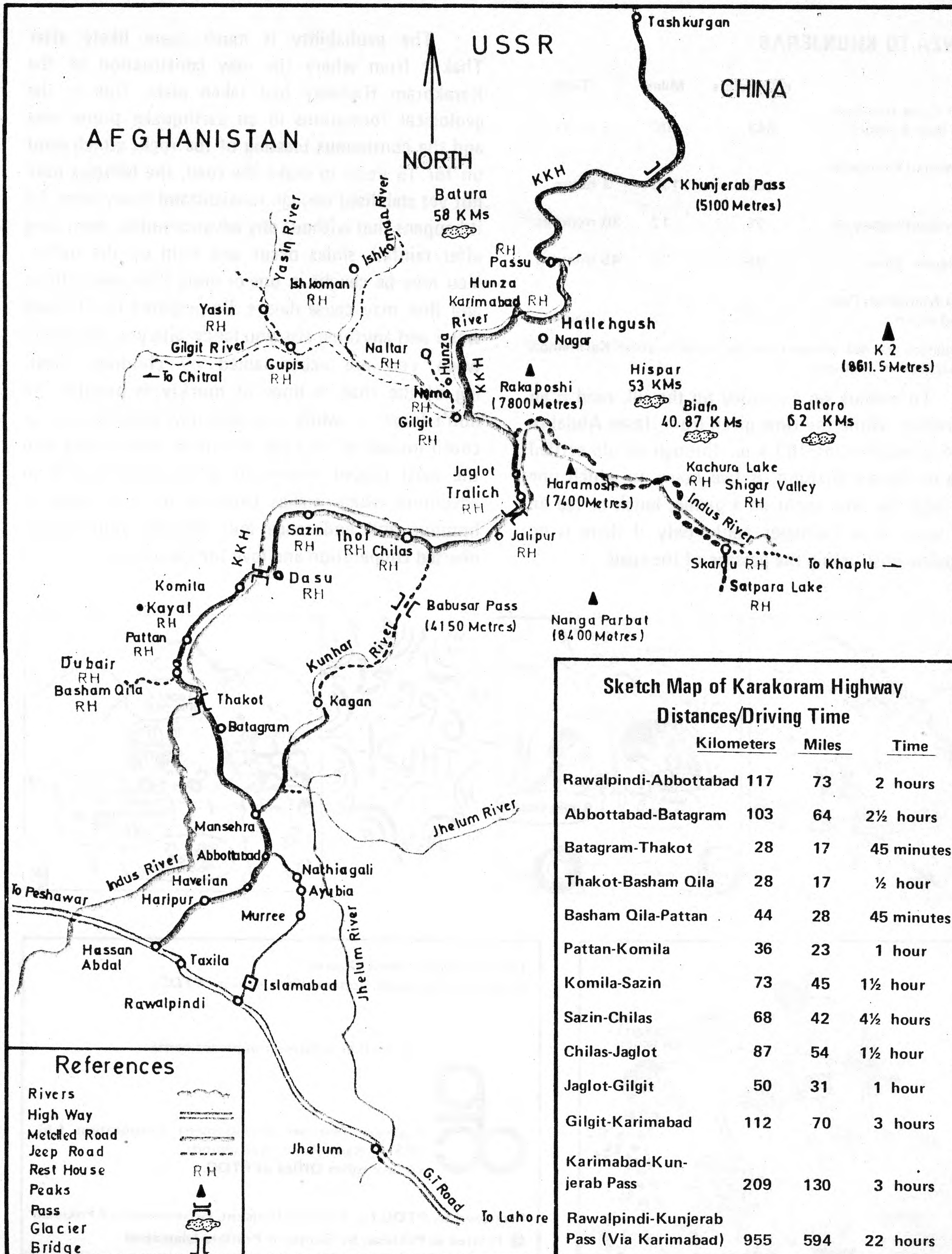


Text by Nancy Hatch Dupree
Photo credits: Louis Dupree, Karl Jettmar, PTDC.

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Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.,
163-A, Bank Road, Rawalpindi.
Or any other Office of PTDC.

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1981



Sketch Map of Karakoram Highway

Distances/Driving Time

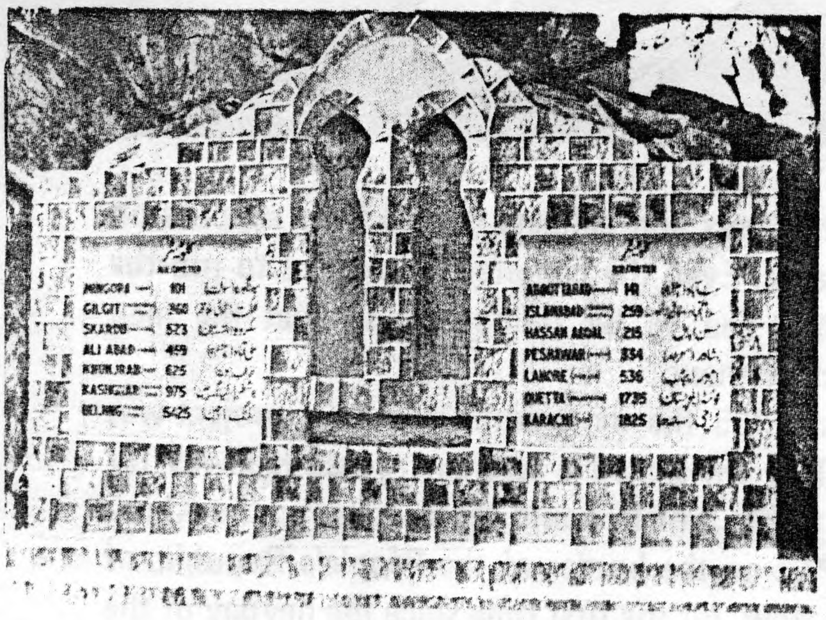
	Kilometers	Miles	Time
Rawalpindi-Abbottabad	117	73	2 hours
Abbottabad-Batagram	103	64	2½ hours
Batagram-Thakot	28	17	45 minutes
Thakot-Basham Qila	28	17	½ hour
Basham Qila-Pattan	44	28	45 minutes
Pattan-Komila	36	23	1 hour
Komila-Sazin	73	45	1½ hour
Sazin-Chilas	68	42	4½ hours
Chilas-Jaglot	87	54	1½ hour
Jaglot-Gilgit	50	31	1 hour
Gilgit-Karimabad	112	70	3 hours
Karimabad-Kunjerab Pass	209	130	3 hours
Rawalpindi-Kunjerab Pass (Via Karimabad)	955	594	22 hours

پاکستان

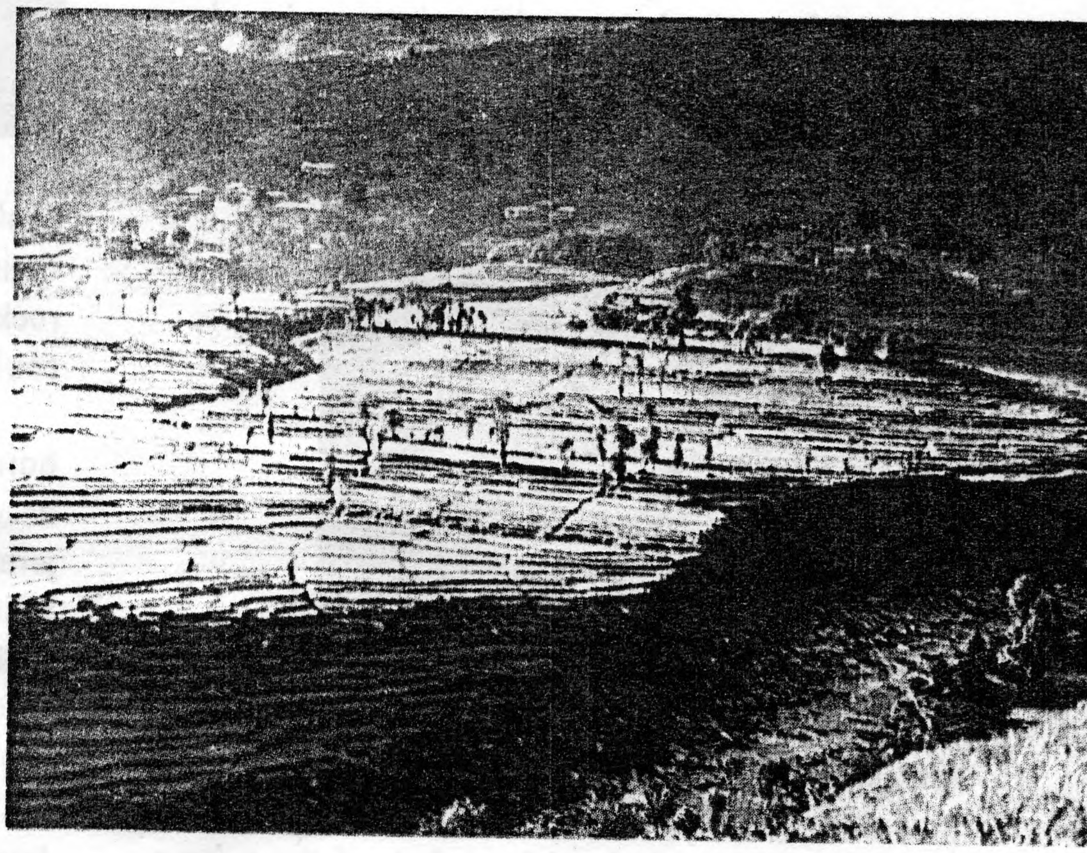
شاهراهِ قراقرم

PAKISTAN

KARAKORAM HIGHWAY

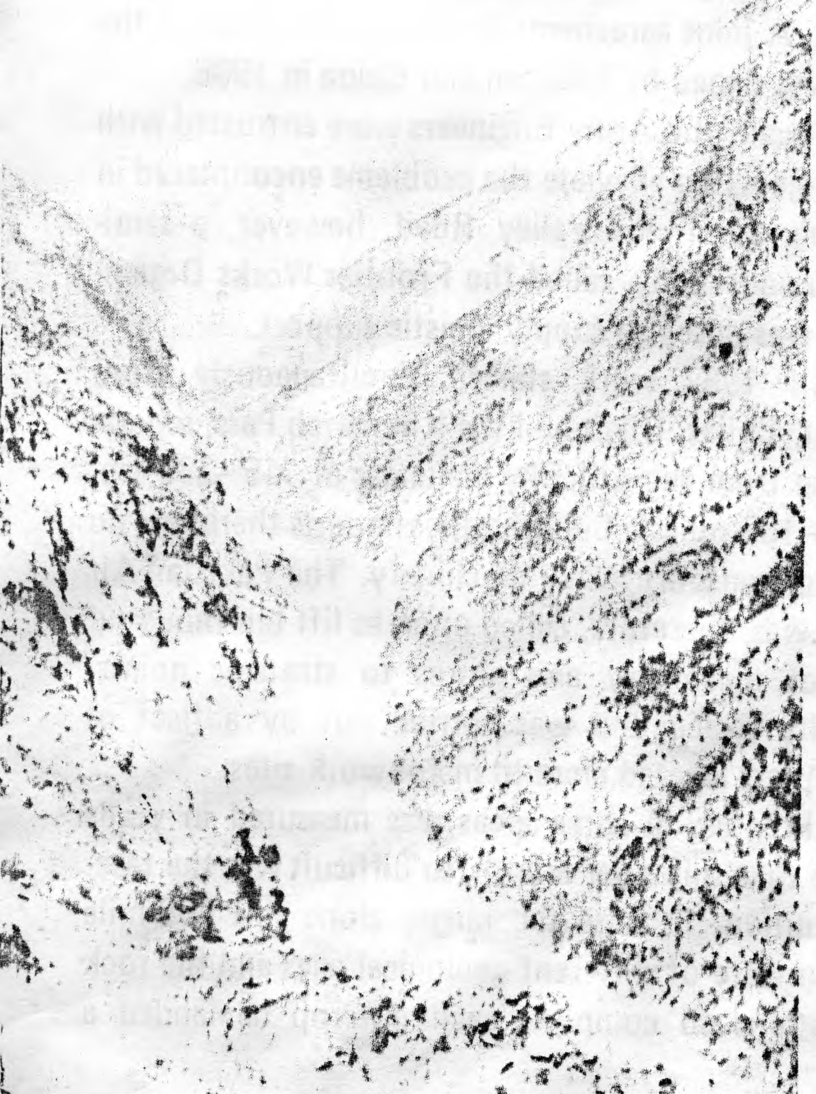


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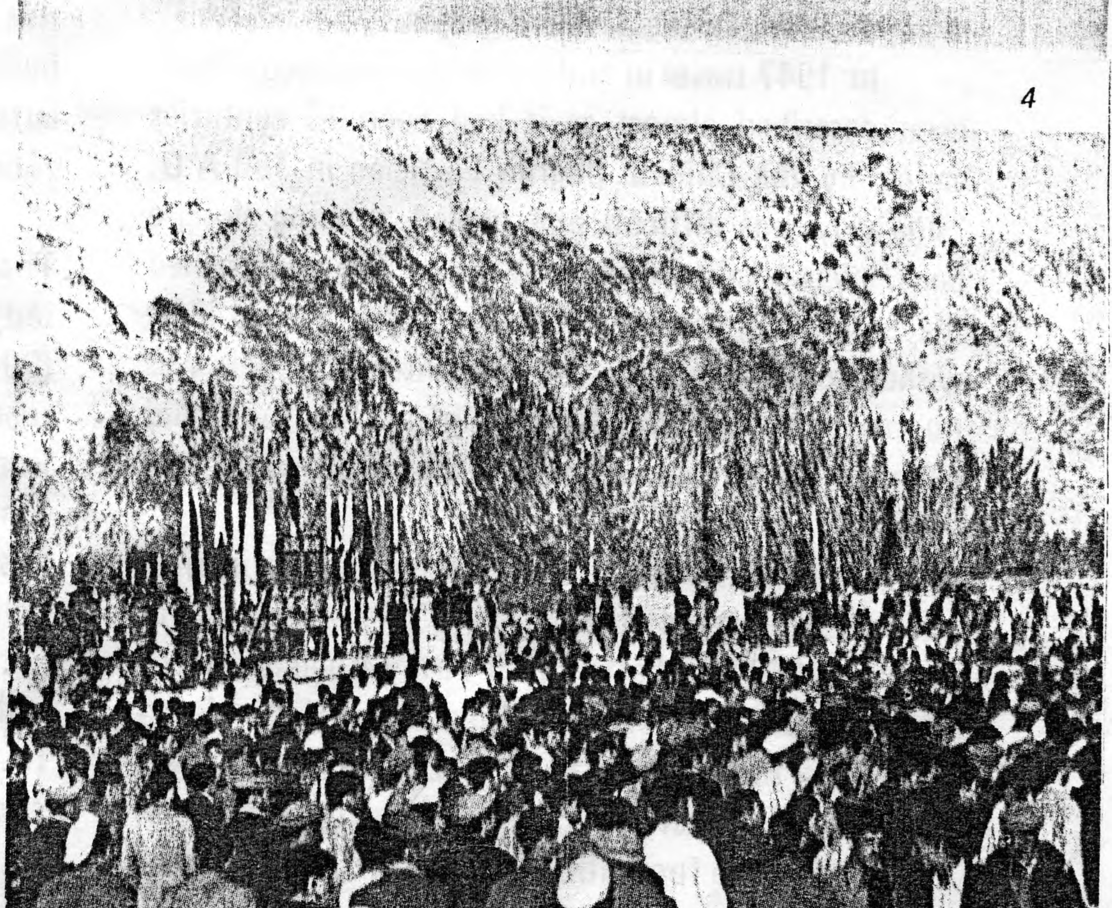


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A TWENTIETH CENTURY MIRACLE



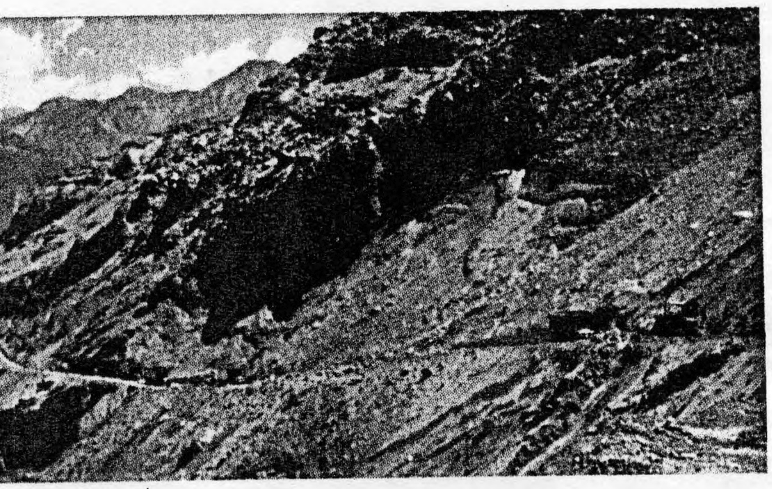
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THE TASK

A 500-mile metalled dual highway snakes through awesome mountains where four giant ranges with peaks averaging 20,000 feet meet and cross. This task took twenty years. At the peak period of its construction 24,500 courageous Pakistanis and Chinese laboured to turn a dream into a miraculous reality.

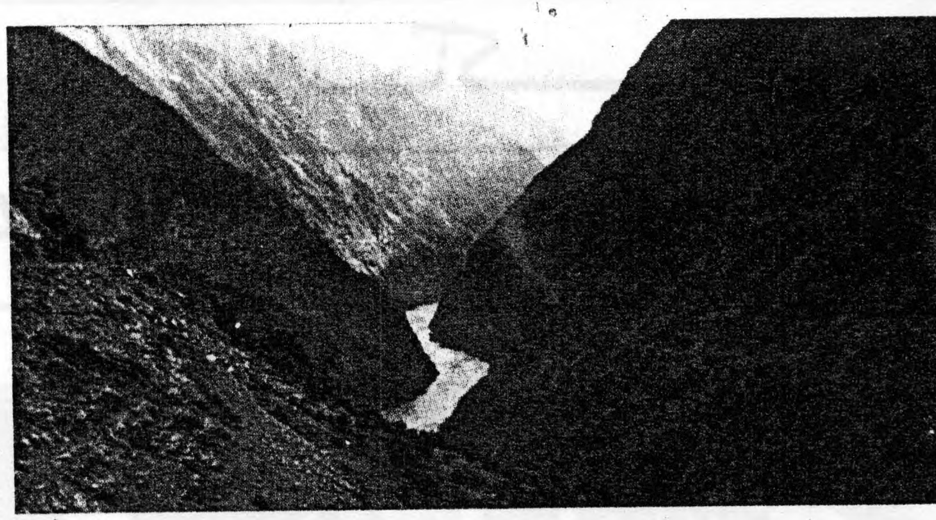


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For many centuries caravans have braved these tortuous mountains treading precariously along paths providing short cuts between the great caravan towns of Central Asia and the rich markets of the subcontinent. However, the trails were hazardous, angry rivers were horrifying to contemplate, and nature's storms caused even the most intrepid to quail on the high passes and in the desolate gorges.

In 1947 travel in and out of the area could have been described almost as it had been 15 centuries earlier by the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hsien in 390 A.D. "The way was difficult and rugged, running along a bank exceedingly precipitous. When one approached the edge of it, his eyes became unsteady; and if he wished to go forward in the same direction, there was no place on which he could place his foot; and beneath were the waters of the river called the Indus."

The new nation of Pakistan was determined to end the isolation of the Northern Areas. As early as January 1959 one battalion of Army Engineers went to Swat to construct a 155-mile Indus Valley Road along the Indus River to Chilas. Two weeks were spent covering just 25 miles before work could even commence. The footpath was so narrow that donkeys



2

could not pass and soldiers carried their supplies on their backs. Even the compressors needed to run the rock-drills had to be dismantled so that the men could carry them.

In 1965 the more ambitious KKH project was born. This envisioned a two-lane paved highway for heavy traffic which would reach as far as the Khunjerab Pass on the border of the People's Republic of China. Now, for the first time since the heyday of the fabled Silk Route which flourished from the 2nd through the 8th centuries A.D., the fertile plains of ancient Gandhara and the Punjab were to be linked with the equally fabled Central Asian cities of Tashkurgan, Kashgar and Urumchi, a railhead leading to Beijing. A joint agreement for the construction of the KKH was signed by Pakistan and China in 1966.

Again, the Army Engineers were entrusted with this project. To alleviate the problems encountered in building the Indus Valley Road, however, a semi-autonomous body called the Frontier Works Organization was raised to supply logistic support.

In 1967 work started simultaneously from Thakot, Chilas, Gilgit and the Khunjerab Pass, separated one from the other by distances of 145–260 km. (90 to 160 miles). Between these points there was no road to transport heavy machinery. The Pakistan Air Force was, therefore, called upon to lift ten thousand tons of machinery and stores to strategic points. Casualty evacuation was carried out by a fleet of helicopters located close to major work sites.

Progress in some areas was measured in yards rather than miles per month, so difficult was the task. In addition, because the ranges along this 500-mile stretch were of different geological ages and the rock formations so complex, each outcrop demanded a

COVER

1. *Karachi to Beijing*
2. *Rice terraces,Batagram*
3. *The Indus River above Komila*
4. *Polo fans, Gilgit*

1. *Roadwork*
2. *The Indus River near Pattan*
3. *In memory*
4. *Pattan Valley*



4



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specific drilling and blasting technique.

Eight thousand tons of explosives were expended to blast the KKH through nature's defences. To complicate the problem, glacial moraines and unstable scree deposits had a disconcerting habit of collapsing without notice, taking the road with them. The famous Pattan earthquake, end of December 1974 for instance, caused large landslides, blocking the road for two weeks. Landslides caused by earth tremors or rains cause the road to be closed for periods. Glaciers also added to the problem, advancing to knock out concrete bridges and forming massive mudflows to chew up the highway.

There are 24 major and 70 smaller bridges along the route, all of which had to be built according to different ecological prerequisites. Because of high-flood levels, deep gorges and fast flowing rivers, each bridge required a specific design: there are plate girder bridges, prestressed bridges, reinforced concrete arched bridges, and suspension bridges.

To combat all these natural obstacles during the peak period of construction 9500 Chinese together with 5000 Pakistanis struggled between Havelian and Thakot, and another 5000 Pakistanis assisted in the logistic services manning hospitals, workshops warehouses and transportation fleets. Of these 24,500 men some 400 gave their lives in the building of the KKH.

The official opening of the KKH took place on 18 June 1978 at Thakot. One engineer commented: "As I now drive down this super highway I honestly cannot believe we really did it." All those who travel the KKH must echo his sentiments.

Permission to travel on KKH *must* be obtained from the Tourism Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, whether one travels by private car, taxi, or bus. Permission usually requires 4 days.

To travel the entire length of the KKH takes a minimum of two very long days of driving by private car from Rawalpindi to Gilgit, 13 hours Gilgit to the Khunjerab Pass and return to Gilgit 13 hours. The bus from the Pir Widhai Bus Station, Rawalpindi takes approximately 15 hours to Gilgit, with one stop enroute.

Minibuses ply between Gilgit and Karimabad, Hunza. There is no regular public transportation from Karimabad to the Khunjerab Pass. PTDC jeeps may be hired for this trip at the Chinar Inn, Gilgit. Hiring charges are:

(i) Rs. 5 per mile
(ii) Rs. 50 per day
(iii) Rs. 50 per night haltage

A more leisurely itinerary taking 5 days permits short visits to Taxila and Hasan Abdal and a picnic lunch at the Moghul Gardens outside Hassan Abdal, with a night stop at Abbottabad from where one may return to Rawalpindi via the beautiful wooded ranges known as Gallis and Murree.

Rawalpindi to Abbottabad

	Kilometers	Miles	Time
Rawalpindi-Abbottabad	117	73	2 hours
Rawalpindi-Taxila turnoff	25	15.5	½ hour
Taxila-Hasan Abdal	20	12.5	½ hour
Hasan Abdal-Abbottabad	72	45	1 hour

Road Tax Rs. 2/-.

Abbottabad: PTDC offices; Springfield and Sarban, Falcon Inn hotels, The Mall, numerous small hotels.


1

1. *Alexander the Great*
2. *Bhir Mound, Taxila*
3. *Moghul Garden, Wah*
4. *Hasan Abdal Bazaar*

2.



5. *Mustard fields, near Haripur*
6. *Narcissus decorating graves*
7. *Sweetmaker*
8. *Shoes galore*

3



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BEGINNING OF ADVENTURE

The KKH adventure begins at Rawalpindi (alt. 514 m (1687 ft.), heading west along the Grand Trunk Road constructed by Emperor Sher Shah Suri. Caravanserais and forts stood at regular intervals along this royal highway; their ruins, such as those at **Sangjani,** picturesquely dot the landscape. At the **Margalla Pass**, cut during the reign of the Moghul Emperor Akbar (1556–1605), a portion of the ancient cobblestone paving may yet be seen. A **monument** in memory of General John Nicholson, one of Britain's famous early frontier administrators, towers above the pass. He fell during the siege of Delhi on 22 September 1857, aged 34.

Soon after the pass, a sign marks the turnoff to the historic valley of Taxila which was acclaimed through many centuries as the most splendid caravan city on these plains. Alexander the Great tarried at Taxila's Bhir Mound in 326 B.C. Taxila was the seat of learning and art during the Buddhist era. The site and the museum are fascinating.

A major imperial Moghul camp site at **Wah**, 43 km (28 miles) from Rawalpindi, was developed into a **Moghul Garden** with magnificent plane trees by order of the Emperor Akbar. Tapering cypress trees, so beloved by the Moghuls, line canals through which cool waters once flowed between elegant, romantic pavilions and cascaded into large reflecting basins. Fish swum in these waters and the emperors delighted in adorning them with golden rings and pearls hung from their noses.

A bustling bus stop bazaar greets one at **Hasan Abdal**, a pilgrim site since at least the 7th century A.D. when Chinese Buddhist pilgrims offered homage to the Serpent-King Elepatra who dwelt within its limpid springs.

The holy Muslim shrine of Baba Wali Kandahari, at Hasan Abdal, known during the 15th century as a spiritual confidant of kings, crowns the high hill on the eastern edge of the town.

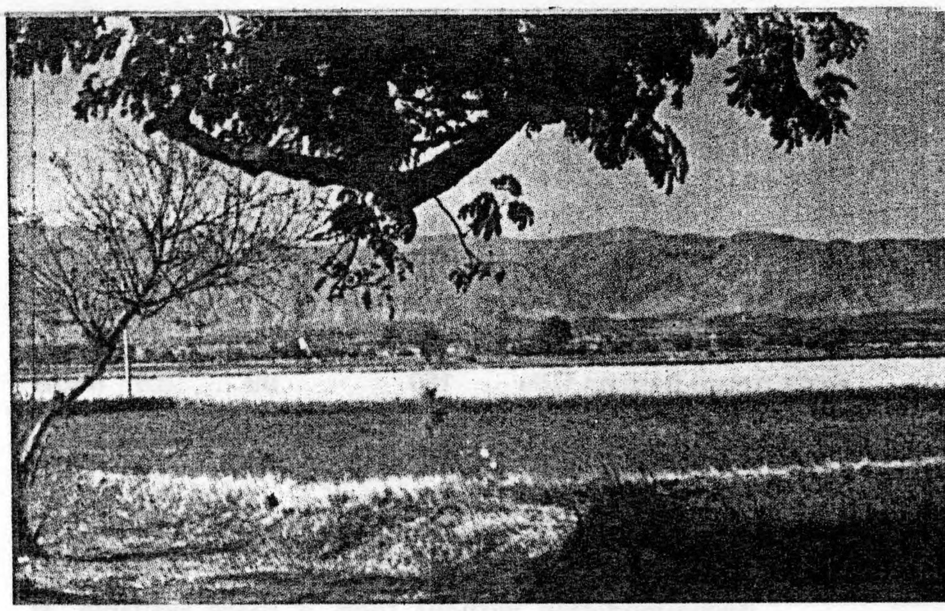
At the foot of the same hill spring-fed pools enhance the Sikh Gurdwara (temple) of Panja Sahab enshrining an impression of the hand of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), founder of the Sikh religion in 1499. *Panja*, meaning five, refers to the five fingers, the hand, of the saint. Thousands upon thousands of Sikh pilgrims continue to visit this gurdwara every year to celebrate the festival of *Baisakhi* during the month of *March*.

Behind the roadside restaurant bazaar there is a colourful general bazaar. On the way to it one passes the gardens containing the mausoleum of Hakim Fath Gilani (d. 1589) and his brother Hummam (d. 1595) two stellar nobles at the court of the Emperor Akbar who visited the mausoleum in February, 1590.

One leaves the Grand Trunk Road at Hasan Abdal and continues in a northeasterly direction through lush fields which are a blaze of yellow in the spring when such oilseed crops as mustard, sesame and rape blossom. Five km (3 miles) from the turnoff a toll gate marks the entrance to Hazara District, the northernmost district of the North-West Frontier and the only district of this province which lies east of the Indus River. It has been suggested by some that Hazara may possibly be taken from Abisara, chief of the Indians who opposed Alexander in the mountains north of Gandhara.

Two large towns lie beyond. The large commercial town of **Haripur** 35 km (22 miles) from Hasan Abdal was founded in 1822, four years after this area had been annexed by the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh (1780–1839). It was named after its governor, Sardar Hari Singh, and functioned as the district headquarters until the administration was transferred to Abbottabad in 1853.

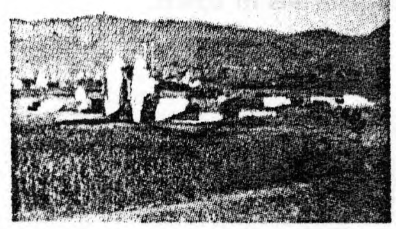
At **Havelian** (22 km. 14 miles from Haripur) an imposing bridge spans the Dor River and the road immediately begins to climb, rising in 15 km, (9 miles) from 766 m (2513 ft) to 1222 m (4010 ft) at Abbottabad. Along this section you will note that many graves are planted with narcissus and frequently decorated with glittering tinsel, a charming custom



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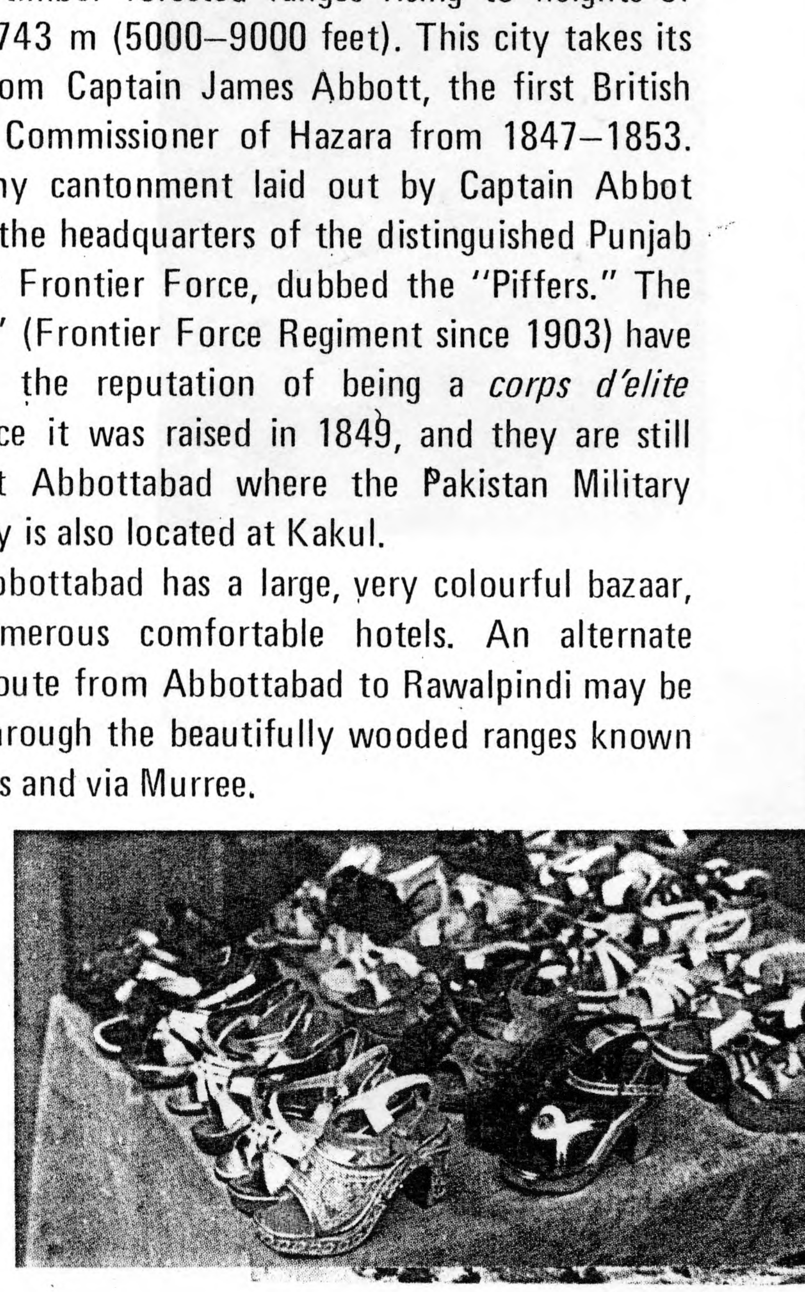


distinctive of this area.

The picturesque city of **Abbottabad** is surrounded by timber forested ranges rising to heights of 1524–2743 m (5000–9000 feet). This city takes its name from Captain James Abbott, the first British Deputy Commissioner of Hazara from 1847–1853. The army cantonment laid out by Captain Abbot became the headquarters of the distinguished Punjab Irregular Frontier Force, dubbed the "Piffers." The "Piffers" (Frontier Force Regiment since 1903) have enjoyed the reputation of being a *corps d'elite* ever since it was raised in 1849, and they are still based at Abbottabad where the Pakistan Military Academy is also located at Kakul.

Abbottabad has a large, very colourful bazaar, and numerous comfortable hotels. An alternate return route from Abbottabad to Rawalpindi may be taken through the beautifully wooded ranges known as Gallies and via Murree.

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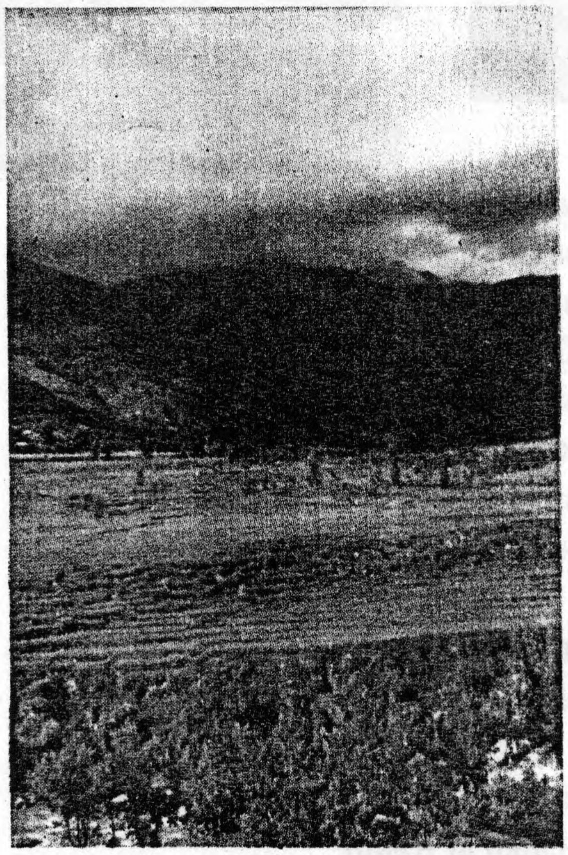
Abbottabad to Gilgit

	Kilometers	Miles	Time
Abbottabad-Gilgit	517	321	10½ hours
Abbottabad-Basham Qila	157	98	3½ hours
Basham Qila-Gilgit	358	223	7 hours

It is advisable to take emergency food and bedding in case of delay.

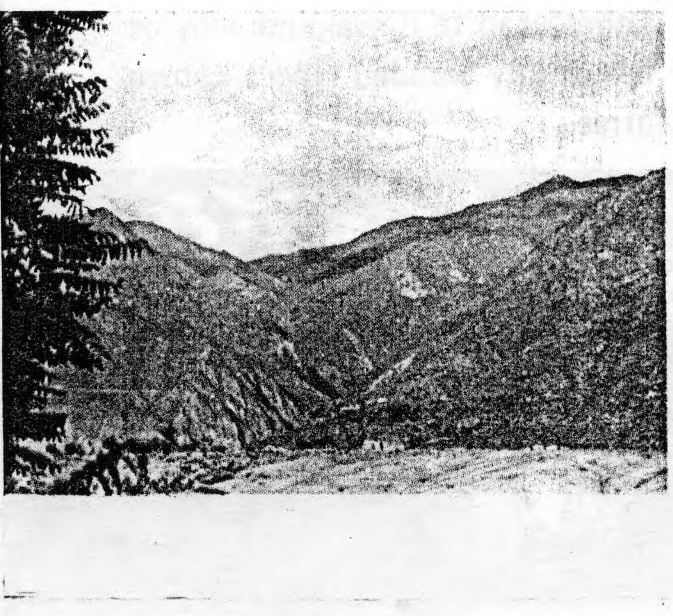
Accommodation without food, if space available, at Sharkul, 60 Kilometers (37.5 miles) 1½ hours north of Abbottabad, and at Basham Qila rest houses. Advance reservation *must* be made through PTDC.

Gilgit : PTDC office at Chinar Inn; 1st class Rakaposhi Hotel on outskirt of town; numerous hotels in town.



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MORALITY EDICTS

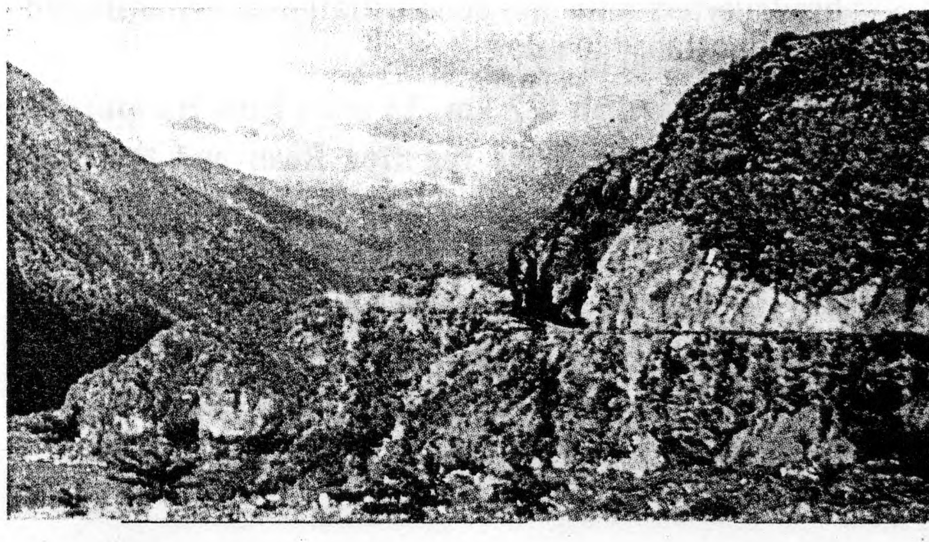
Leaving Abbottabad, the KKH winds through gentle hills thickly planted with pines and fruit trees. On entering the township of Mansehra (26 km; 16 miles; 35 min.) take the left fork for Gilgit; right fork leads to the Kaghan Valley.

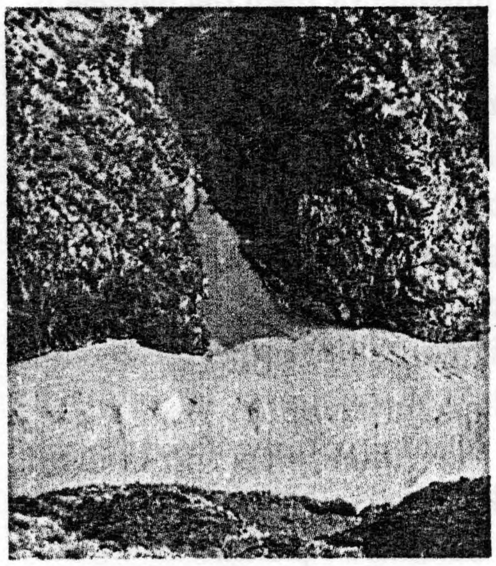
Fourteen edicts issued by the Mauryan King Ashoka (ca. 257 B.C.) are inscribed on three massive boulders on the northern slope of Mansehra. Signs on the KKH explain these morality edicts abolishing the slaughter of man and beast, recommending kindness, good deeds, and selfcontrol.

The large town of **Batagram**, north of the Naudiar Water-shed (73 km; 45 mi; 1½ hrs. from Mansehra), offers a small hotel and petrol. Beyond Batagram the road crosses a ridge from which one sees a sturdy mountain wall at the end of a narrow cleft. Twisting and turning the road descends for 20 miles seeking an exit from this rocky chasm where the green terraces are replaced by sparse grassy clumps and scrub. At the end is the Indus River. Here a marker identifies the 2163 m (7100 ft.) mountain on the opposite bank as **Pir Sar** which some say is the famous Rock of Aornos where Alexander fought Swat's chieftains in 327 B.C.

From now on the road hovers above the Indus which cuts relentlessly through the mountains, gathering the turquoise waters of melting snows and glaciers. At **Thakot** (alt. 766 m; 2513 ft; 4 km; 2.5 mi. beyond Pir Sar) one makes the first of many crossings over the Indus and heads for an area appropriately called Kohistan, Land of Mountains. There is a large bazaar at **Basham Qila** (28 km; 17 mi; ½ hr. above Thakot), the headquarters of the Kohistan Development Board.

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After Basham Qila the road bugs the hill on the right bank; on the left cliffs tower high, their faces hidden by scrub and low grasses. Despite the difficult terrain, villages and terraced fields doggedly cling to the precipitous hillsides.

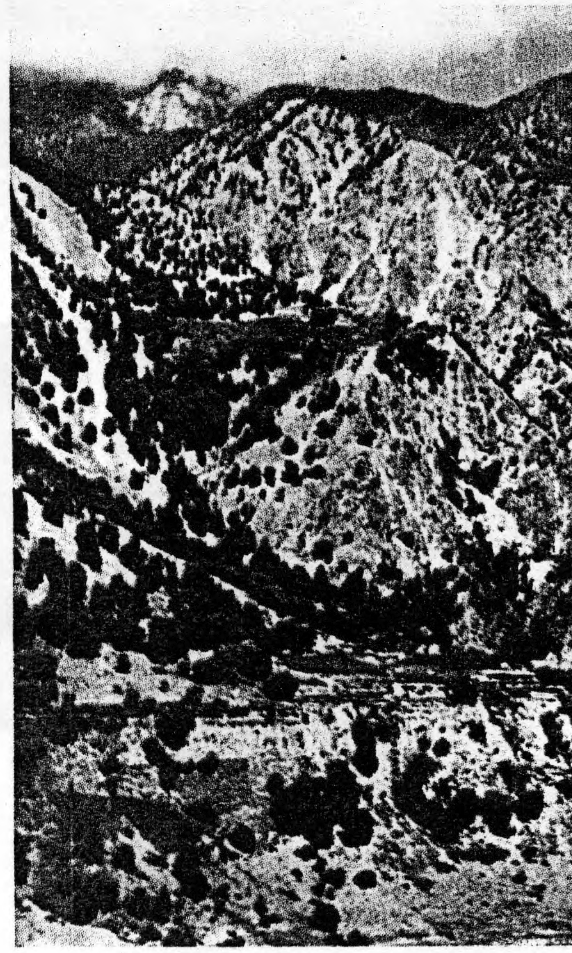
Passing **Pattan** (44 km; 28 mi; 45 min. above Basham Qila), administrative centre of Kohistan, the road bores through the mountain rock. Here, because there were no footholds, the roadbuilders had to climb ropes and pitons to place the blasting charges, but in spite of the ruggedness there are periodic roadside bazaars.

Two and a half hours above Pattan one crosses into Gilgit and the scenery changes dramatically. Gravels and sands marking the position of the Indus millennia ago now sit high on starkly bare slopes streaked with geological deposits of silvery-gray, green, pink and violet hues. Only occasional oases gleam like emeralds. Summer temperatures run high and can reach 118 degrees F(47° C) but rushing spring waters offer welcome refreshment.

The general isolation is broken at **Chilas**, and after the town of **Jaglot** (only 50 km; 31 mi: from Gilgit) villages again sprawl across the hillsides. At the foot of Mt. Haramosh (7397 m; 24,270 ft.) the Indus is joined by the Gilgit River which the KKH follows northward.

1. *Tarraced valley, near Batagram*
2. *Pir Sar, Alexander's Aornos*
3. *Nearing Basham Qila*
4. *Glacial stream joins the Indus*
5. *High plateau, beyond Sazin*
6. *Mountain villages, north of Basham Qila*

6



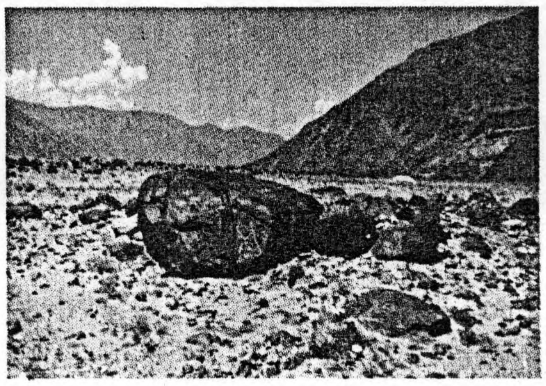
BOULDER FIELDS AND PETROGLYPHS

The KKH has enticed scholars to explore its terrain, with remarkable results. The early history of the Northern Areas is still hazy, but new discoveries offer tantalizing glimmers into an excitingly eventful past.

This rich saga is being partly unveiled through the study of petroglyphs pecked into the dark copper-red patina glazing the water-smoothed faces and rounded recesses of boulders scattered along waterways, from the rock-strewn plains west of Chilas, north to Hunza, and west to Gupis. The petroglyphs appear singly on small rocks, or in exuberant profusion from various periods on massive outcrops. Many cluster beside ancient river crossings as prayers and expressions of gratitude for safe passage. The designs are so varied that it is possible to trace the passage of kings and conquerors, politicians and merchants, missionaries and pilgrims over 2000 years.

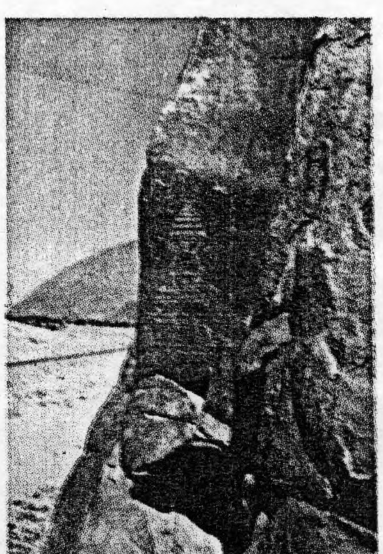
Symbols sacred to prehistoric, Buddhist and Hindu ritual abound, but the ibex predominates. For millennia this graceful mountain goat symbolized fertility, and figured predominantly in rituals associated with life sustaining hunts. Drawings of bulls and horses in the 4th–3rd centuries B.C. style of South Siberia suggest that horse-riders from Central Asia established small kingdoms along this trade route to the rich markets on Gandhara's plains.

Figures in Parthian dress and inscriptions naming Kushan kings point to the extension of Gandhara's rulers into these hills to protect this branch of the Silk Route between India and China, which was at its busiest from the 1st–3rd centuries A.D. under Kushan rule. Petroglyphs of sacred Buddhist stupas attest to patronage of Buddhism; Hindu symbols emerge with the rise of militant Hinduism in Gandhara. After Central Asian Hephthalites displaced the Kushans, they added their tribal signs to these sacred boulders.

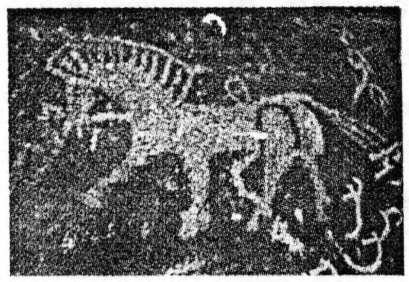

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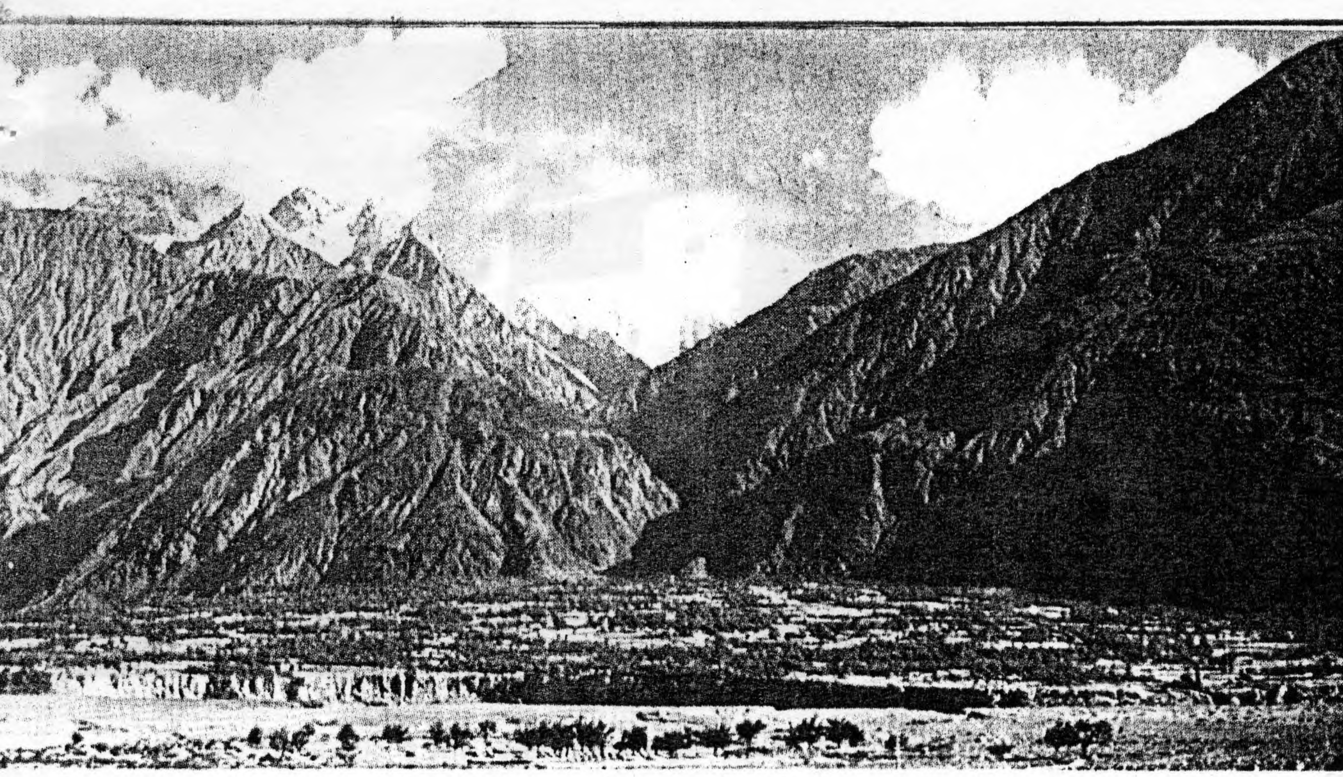

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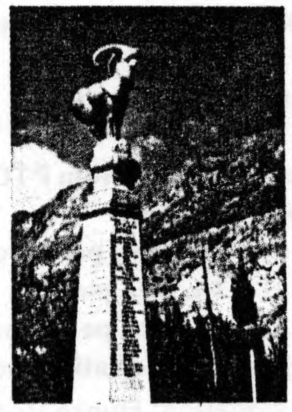

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1. *Chilas*
2. *Bowman; Alam Bridge, 41 kilometers below Gilgit*
3. *Ibex; Alam Bridge*
4. *Buddhist stupa, Chilas*
5. *Buddhist stupa, Chilas*
6. *Central Asian Horse, west of Chilas*
7. *Parthian warrior, west of Chilas*



Altitude :1490 meters (4890 ft.)

Population: 2,00,000—Gilgit district
17.000—Gilgit town.



1 2

1. *Mount Rakaposhi, from Daiynor*
2. *Monument to the War of Liberation 1947-1948; Chinar Gardens*
3. *Modernizing agriculture*
4. *A venerable Gilgiti*
5. *Gilgit lady wearing traditional high embroidered hat*

GILGIT

The KKH has restored Gilgit to its former position as a major depot on the trade route to Central Asia. After travel along the Silk Route became unsafe a little over a thousand years ago, scant trade moved through this area. When the British defeated the Sikhs in 1846, Gilgit was included with Kashmir in the territory they awarded to the Hindu Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh. Dogra forces were garrisoned at Gilgit in 1851 and in the late 1880s the first mule track was constructed to tie Gilgit with Kashmir.

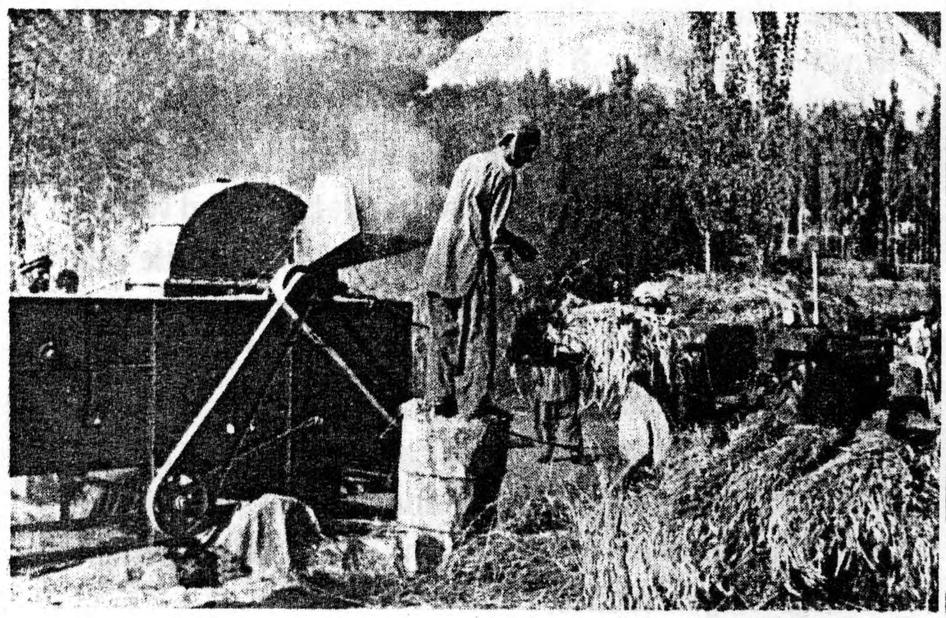
The local princes paid Kashmir a yearly tribute in goats, grain, butter and gold-dust washed from the river's sands. According to Herodotus, gold-dust formed part of the tribute sent from this area to the Persian Achaemenids as long ago as the 6th century B.C.

At the time of Independence, in 1947, the people of this area refused to accede to India.

The Corps of Northern Scouts, together with local freedom fighters, fought so valiantly that when a U.N. cease-fire was declared on 1 January 1949, Gilgit remained with Pakistan.

There are first class hotels as well as smaller ones in this fast-growing town seated in the shadow of magnificent Mt. Rakaposhi, 7778 m; 25,551 ft.

The PTDC office is located at the Chinar Inn, opposite the Chinar Gardens beside the Gilgit River, spanned by one of Asia's longer suspension bridges, 183 m; 600 ft. long. Fine local woollen fabrics called

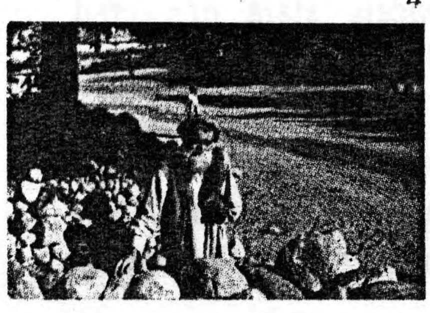


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patti may be purchased; a special store carries Chinese items. Polo games cause much excitement in October. The rules of the game are quite different from the standard rules. In fact, there are no rules !

The fertile Gilgit Valley produces superb fruits; like tree-ripened Gilgiti peaches. Because the KKH permits modern machinery to move in, the valley's rich natural resources are now being more efficiently exploited.

4



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